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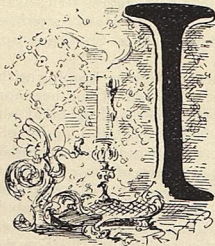
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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

COLONIAL FURNITURE.

BY JAMES CARRUTHERS.



It has been remarked that with the styles of furniture that have successively prevailed, there has been no appreciation of their merits in the periods immediately following, this being reserved for after times. The cause may possibly be assigned to a certain degree of prejudice excited by reaction or love of change. The colonial style certainly affords an illustration. It is only of late years that its inherent excellences can be said to have obtained a proper degree of attention. So far as its characteristics are concerned these sprang at once into full maturity. The formative influences that led to it may have been ripening unseen, for all one knows, since the period of the Italian renaissance; it is incontestable, however, that it was a new growth without pre-

ornament allowed to overwhelm structural design. Constructional details are invariably emphasised, and ornamentation never seems to lose touch to that to which it pertains. In short, we find an air of completeness, the result of the presence of the elements of good composition. It is evident from the variety in productions, all possessing these enumerated characteristics, that the colonial furniture and cabinet designer did not affect imitation; their freedom of treatment shows that they felt the ground firm under their feet.

The furniture of the hall was substantial but simplicity itself. Without any aspect of fragility in the appointments, no impression of extreme massiveness, such as would be only suitable to a baronial-like corridor was aimed at. For example, we meet with a light and well finished sofa-like seat with railed back and sides, and a stand with mirror in center, the back being extended so as to present carved radiations from the sides of the mirror, these included in a semi-circular mahogany band between which and the carved frame of stand was a center space conforming to the outline of the carving and relieving the solid mass. Pillars of center arch made a picturesque feature, the shafts with spiral semi-circular forms ceasing at a given point, where grooved lines shot up to the scroll capital to which they naturally led the eye.



CHIPPENDALE FURNITURE FOR RECEPTION ROOM, BY J. P. McHUGH.

cedent in Europe. The many eclectic styles prevailing undoubtedly prepared its way. These in the blending of new features drawn from various sources, including the rich, florid and labored ornamentation of the East—modifications requiring time and experience to combine what was fitting and to discard what was unsuitable, were, with the advent of revived colonial furniture, brought into contrast with a style that had character of its own—stateliness without stiffness, ornamentation that was tasteful without being in excess, embodiment of ornament in natural as distinguished from extreme conventionalised forms, that drew upon the classic without being enslaved by it, and, above all, presented a breadth and repose as delightful to the eye as it was grateful to the mind. Further, the old examples brought to light displayed conscientious workmanship. The best examples of colonial furniture are distinguishable by beauty and correctness of form and absence of meretricious detail; nor was

It is great praise that there is nothing about the ornamentation of colonial furniture that bears the appearance of being peculiar, it looks just such as would naturally be suggested as most suitable, however much consideration its selection may have involved. In carving we see proper proportionate disposition of dimensions and correct spacing of hollows and prominences. A feature in construction is evident fitness to purpose. The colonial designers of chairs, not content with supplying a back of curved outline also furnished a center of concave form which dispensed with any need of upholstery stuffing. It would be difficult to find original colonial cabinet work that does not display features of graceful elegance. A sideboard top has at each side resting on pillared supports a carved canopy supported on pillars, with a winged head at the apex of each intervening arch and a frieze and cornice in architectural style; all this apparently to support the fanciful carved work above them. The base shows carved

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panels of cupboards to right and left, and center space with curtain drawn on each side in heavy folds, this answering to the recessed space left by the canopies above. A frequent form of colonial table was an elongated oval top divided in center, so that one leaf working on concealed hinges could be folded back on the other for economy of space—the legs, slender and square, lessening in dimension downward. One admires the fine workmanship of a table which after a century and a half of strain and wear, gives no sign of unstableness, no wavering even of the extended leaf that seems hung in air. In a hall clock we find the hands not mere narrow flat cut bands of metal, but broad and elegantly fashioned, often showing charming interlacings, the disc presenting a mellow soft silvery hue, possibly enriched with vaguely defined chased designs; the pillars that support the entablature are invariably plain, contortions or spiral forms being calculated to draw attention from the disc, but this disc ornamented, we are treated not unfrequently to some beautifully designed carving.

Here is a piano case taking the place of the old harpsichord, to which in shape the sounding-board conforms. How delicately is the overhanging edge of the lid rounded shell-like off, with beaded oval ornament beneath. The legs fluted in semi-circular lines surmounted by a Doric scroll are finished off at foot with boldly developed lions claws. The tables with spiral twisted

may instance the carved canopy heads of beds being made in some instances to correspond with a band of carved work carried round the room to divide off the frieze from the middle wall space, and placed at the same level. This rendered the projecting canopy at the head of the bed in a high degree structural, the more so that when affixed to the wall, it stood separate from the bed itself, so avoiding giving to it a top-heavy appearance.

Lamps, many of them of wrought work, were in keeping with the rest of the furniture appointments. Instead of cumbersome suspended masses of metal, we meet with zones of iron band set with bosses, with branched stems for holding candles, or for oil lamps set with glass stem and leaf work delicately manipulated round the base, and even inpinning on the face of the glass as if through vigorous growth, whilst the delicate chains of ovals and twining plant and sundry fashioned knobs of metal reflected back the light, with everchanging effect, from a thousand points. Similarly iron balustrades, railings, gates and grilles, their parts welded at the forge at a white heat, were artistically dealt with, attracting rather than repelling the sight, as displaying delicacy united to strength.

There is no question that the revived colonial style has exerted an excellent and disciplinary influence on all classes of furniture. In this journal we have never lost an opportunity of



THE FAIRY BARK—A DECORATIVE SKETCH.

or spindle formed legs resting on a horizontal carved support and not unfrequently connected above with carved scroll work were veritable *pièces de résistance* and are to be admired for the tastefulness of the details carefully worked out. In old colonial times, when rooms were not crowded with furniture, low oblong stools with numerous protruding legs, on which the best resources of the carvers art were expended, completed an attractive feature that might well be revived.

A decided advantage in setting off the furniture of those times was the comparative lowness of the chief rooms as compared with those of modern dwellings. The furniture thus escaped a certain degree of dwarfing. Again, walls were chiefly in monochrome; wall paper and painted figure designs being the exception; if a serviceable element of variety of effect was thus excluded, the furniture was made more prominent.

In illustration of how closely the features of rooms were studied in reference to the furniture to be set up in them, we

referring to it where it served to emphasise, by way of illustration, a true principle of construction or decoration.

TAKING the work up as a pleasant pastime, ladies may advantageously and at their leisure engage in making frieze ornaments for walls otherwise bare, such as cinque cento ornaments or wreaths of flowers. Owing to the nature of the material, the designs may be carried out with the utmost delicacy, rivaling, indeed, the most costly carving with its elaborate undercutting. The wreaths may be made so light as to have scarcely appreciable weight. Such apparent weight as to seem to be strongly sustained is always a drawback to attached ornaments. These may be readily picked out in gold and colors. As a memento of individual skill good leather work, whether on walls, center of panels, toilet boxes or picture frames, will always be pleasing.